

Dreamer

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Summary: He wanders his days yearning for something. He spends his nights sleeping in a tower of his own imagination. A Tale of Sleeping Beauty. A birthday fic for mattsloved1.

Dreamer

A/N: First of all a very late Happy Birthday to mattsloved1. I am not really sure where this came from. Originally, I was writing a story about John coming home the end of a long day. It was April and there was snow on the ground, no doubt influenced by the weird weather I am experiencing here:P But when he entered the flat I realised it was empty, so then I had to figure out why and where was Sherlock. The general premise is based on Sleeping Beauty.

Any mistakes are my own.

Coming in out of the rain and mist of the evening, he wipes his feet, shakes out his umbrella and dumps it in the stand. He removes his jacket and hangs it on the peg to dry. Cane in hand, he trudges slowly up the stairs, all seventeen of them. Damp and chilled from his walk home, both leg and shoulder aching, he looks forward to putting the kettle on and brewing a cup, no, a whole pot of tea. A vision of sitting in his chair, hand curled around a steaming mug warms his heart a little, presents him with a pale glow of contentment to ward off the perpetual loneliness. His stomach rumbles. Lunch had been skipped, and he thinks about the soup leftover from the other day.

Entering the kitchen through the door off of the hall, he flicks on some lights. The nights are shorter, and the flat's dim when he comes home. He rather wishes he'd remember to leave some lights on before he leaves in the morning, but it's better than wasting electricity. Crossing the kitchen to the stove, he puts on the kettle and pulls out the teapot and a mug. The container of soup hides away at the back of the fridge, so he shuffles the milk and the eggs out of the way.

Turning back to the counter he blinks. There are now two mugs sitting there. He must have been somewhere else in his head when he took down the second one. A weary tiredness seeps into his bones and curls around the chill and ache that are already there, adding weight to everything. With a sigh that escapes almost unnoticed, he pours the soup into a bowl and sets it in the microwave. Before heading into the sitting room to start a fire in the fireplace, he returns the second mug to the cupboard, but fondles the handle, thoughtful.

With the fire crackling, he finishes his soup whilst watching the evening news. As usual, it's grim, and he wonders, not for the first time why he bothers. The rate of crime in London seems to increase daily and so do the number of unsolved cases. What is the world coming to?

There's not much on the telly, so he turns it off, reads some of the latest medical journals. Surprised by the lateness of the hour, he stands up to head for bed. Banking the fire, the lights turned off in the sitting room he turns to head upstairs to his room.

He stops, face crumpled in perplexity.

Muttering to himself, he walks through the kitchen to his bedroom, flicking off the lights as he goes. The room's cozy, here at the back of the flat. It warms up fairly well and is dark enough for sleep. Most nights, he doesn't remember his dreams, which is a bit of a blessing. Teeth brushed, he rubs some analgesic cream into his shoulder and switches off the light. Seeing as it's colder tonight and he had been half frozen, he digs out a clean pair of pyjamas puts them on and crawls into bed. He reads for a while, an old and familiar spy novel. After a few pages, he checks the alarm for the morning, closes his book and turns off his light. Rolling over, he falls asleep almost instantly.

The discordant beep of the alarm drags him awake. There was something, something there that he loses hold of when he comes out of sleep enough to shut off the noise. A faint odour of cigarettes lingers at the edge of his memory and an impossible shade of blue-green. The desire to just lose himself back in whatever and wherever that was, to fold himself into the cracks and crevasses of yearning, is stronger today, and it takes a monumental effort to throw back the covers and slide out of bed.

Morning routine taken care of, breakfast is its usual disappointment. He leaves the sitting room and pauses on the landing, looking at the wall. Almost as strong as the pull from last night is the desire to climb stairs that do not exist. He runs a hand over the faded wallpaper, feels the embossed bramble under his hand and wonders. Slowly he turns and makes his way down to the front door, slips on his jacket and heads out. As he is closing the door behind him, he thinks he sees a vague movement out of the corner of his eye down the hallway where the empty flat sits, a trick of the light, a sense of memory, dÃ©jà vu all over again. With a shrug, he is off, limping through another day of grey existence.

The only joy is his work. He is inordinately pleased to help people. A good day's work of diagnosing illnesses and treating injuries lightens whatever load he seems to be carrying. But as the day progresses and evening creeps back in, he faces another journey back to an empty flat filled with a solitary night.

Standing on the platform to take the Underground back home, the crowd presses in and the scent of cigarettes is strong again. He turns; his eyes track a tall figure in a dark coat, dark hair, dark enchantment, dark magic, everything is dark, and he stumbles. A hand steadies him.

"All right there, mate?" A grey haired man asks, concern writ on his kind face.

"Yes, thanks," he nods and the idea he knows him won't leave. So he asks, "Do I know you?"

Warm brown eyes regard him, thoughtful and kind. "No, at least, I don't think so. But," he laughs, "maybe we met in dreams." A noise distracts him, a muffled shout down at the end of the platform. He turns back, and the man has disappeared.

Shudders creep down his spine, catpaw soft, a recollection, a whisper of fog.

The door to the flat looms in front of him, no time between thought and action to arrive here. Before he pushes open the door, he looks up and down the street, again a distant shout pulling his attention. There's nothing, but the fog is thicker tonight and things are obscured.

Closing the door behind him, the routine from the night before is repeated sans umbrella. He climbs the stairs, all fifty-two of them. He is tired and winded by the time he reaches the top. He rests on the landing and runs his hand over the faded wallpaper, feeling the individual thorns skim under his skin.

"Bugger!" Turning his hand over, he glimpses blood as red as cherries welling up on his thumb. Automatically sticking it in his mouth, though the doctor in him would not be impressed, he sucks it a little. He eyes the wallpaper thoughtfully, the trick of twilight making it appear as though the brambles sink back into the wall.

Comfort in the routine of a thousand nights, he heats up leftover soup and puts the kettle on, carefully taking down only one mug. No fire tonight, not because it isn't damp, but because it would take effort. He sits and watches the inanity of the news wondering about the state of the world and how the police can work with all there is to do. Washing up after, he tidies and decides he might head to the pub down the street for a pint. On the landing once more, an uneasy feel to the back of his neck, he looks over his shoulder and gasps, then chuckles weakly, his imagination filling in the eye of a great dragon in amongst the brambles and thorns, steam rising from its nostrils. He must be so very tired and grey to be seeing this. He heads back into the flat, closed and locks the door. It seems to use just one more bit of soul-sapping energy.

He shuts the lights off and goes to the bedroom, repeats the routine from the night before and crawls into bed, this time in the dark. Lying awake for a long time, he stares at nothing until his eyes hurt. Succumbing to sleep, he doesn't remember anything in the morning.

Rinse and repeat, the day is almost the same; only this time there's a young woman sitting beside him on the Underground. Pretty, long brown hair in a ponytail she hums unconsciously to herself. At one point she turns to him, smiles and whispers, "Do you remember your name?"

"Pardon me?"

The car comes to a stop, and she gets off, he watches her leave, the swing of her hair mesmerizing.

Again the walk seems to be over in seconds, not the minutes it should take. As he fits his key in the lock, there is a low growl not far over. Adrenalin spikes through him, and he glances down the street. A large black dog glows, eyes livid red. The lock springs and he enters as it lunges, slams the door in its face. He swears he felt the breath of teeth as they snapped.

Heart racing, he leans against the door for a moment before he has to climb the seventy-nine steps to the flat. That was perhaps more of an adventure than he needed.

Stopping at the top of the stairs, he warily glances at the brambles. They seem calm tonight, subdued and sleeping in the wall. There is no dragon. Maybe the dog scared it off.

A nice bowl of warm soup from the other day fills his belly, and a mug of tea helps warm his soul. The night seems long and empty, and there isn't much on except the news, filled with the rise of crime and murders, most of which remain unsolved. There is no mention of a large black hound or a dragon. He shuts off the telly and heads for bed.

A soft slithering noise can be heard on the landing, the sound of a reptilian belly rubbing against the floor and he opens the door to look, light from the street gleams on poisonous green scales as a tail flows through the wall. The brambles rattle, a skeletal clacking noise. He jumps back as the spiked end flicks near him, the size of the tail causes the flick to be somewhat violent, and he is nearly gored. The spike is dripping with something that leaves steaming holes in the carpet. He shuts the door firmly and wipes his brow.

This night he sits on his bed and thinks about what he saw. It has the watercolour illusion of dreaming, but he knows he is awake. No one could feel this depressed and this dead in a dream. There is too much of nothing in his life for this not to be reality. He rubs a hand across his brow and crawls into bed without removing his clothes. He falls down the dark tunnel of sleep.

He stands on a roof and sees two men. The wind whips the words out of their mouths, and he is unable to hear them. Unease hangs over them, illuminating the fear and hatred that drives them. They circle and dance around each other, pulling and pushing, their bodies swaying with intent. He jumps when there is the roar of gunfire, and one of the men lies on the roof, blood flowing from his head. The other is horror struck and then calmly steps to the edge. He appears to be speaking on his mobile; his other hand outstretched to touch something (someone) on the ground below. The phone's tossed aside, his arms out-stretch, the wings of his great coat flap around him. Up

on his toes, he perches and falls forward, the wings he had perhaps hoped would save him, clipped, useless, for coats can't create lift.

As if his feet were rooted, tendrils spreading down through the material of the rooftop, he finds he can't move, anchored there. He wants to open his mouth to scream, yell a name, do something to stop it from happening, but he can't.

"John," someone says, a caress in the dark. A hand touches his cheek, wipes a tear, smooths his fringe. He is sure he feels lips brush his forehead. He wants to wake up and see who the speaker is, who the dreamer is, but sleep holds him fast. He doesn't remember this in the morning.

After a disappointing breakfast, he leaves the flat, cane in hand. The wall looks normal or at least at first blush it does. He sees a fine crack running through the wallpaper that he was sure wasn't there before. He places a palm on it. The brambles under his hand are sharp, and he moves it careful so as not to impale himself on the thorns. With his fingernail he picks at it, trying to get a hold of an edge. It begins to tear revealing not a wall of plaster, but a wall of brambles reaching up higher than the top of the roof. It is so high it blocks the sun, and the light recedes from its shadow.

He pulls a little harder, and more hedge is revealed. He takes off the jumper he had been wearing and wraps it around his hand an arm, an imperfect gauntlet to protect him from the thorns. The bramble is unyielding and unforgiving; his jumper is torn to shreds, and he has made no headway. He returns to the flat, finds some gloves. Although they are leather, somehow he knows they will protect his skin. Back at the hedge he pulls and pries trying to create space to crawl through. He has one ear open for the sound of scales sliding on the ground or the hiss of steam escaping out of the snout of a dragon, but there is nothing but the clack of the brambles. Squeezing his body through the Narnian layers, his clothes snag on the thorns. He is scratched and cut, and blood runs down. The dirt under his feet seems to welcome it, and he thinks he sees the hedge grow with his reluctant offering.

Hours, days, years later he breaks through. He is in a large clearing. A ruined castle in the very heart, crumbles, looking as if a strong wind will knock it over. There is sunlight shining on this side of the hedge, but it is weak and thin.

His body aches muscles sore and his skin stings from numerous cuts, his sweat mingling with blood. He is catching his breath when he hears the distant ring of the screech of a furious beast. Turning his face to the sky, he feels it before he sees it. The sun seems to dim and the scales of the beast glow green. It roars, lifting its head and paints the sky with fire.

He is alone; he is unarmed, and will die, but he will do it on his feet. Gripping the only weapon he has, his cane, he holds it in front of him. It gleams silver in the sun. He looks again. His cane has transmuted into a weapon, a broadsword, long and lethal. The tattered remains of his jumper are now a shield. With another unholy screech, the dragon descends, a sinister noise falling out of its mouth, which he thinks might be laughter.

"So, pet," it says, with its metallic syllebant hiss, "do you miss him? Do you mourn him? He was never yours."

He gritted his teeth, refusing to respond to this creature. He couldn't; he didn't know what he was talking about.

The dragon leaned down an evil gleam in its eye. "You don't remember. How rich, how wonderful. He flew for you, flew high and landed, splat, for you and you don't remember him. What a sad little man you are." It laughed, fire dribbling from its snout.

Still he says nothing, just brandishes the sword in front of him. It is unbelievably heavy, and he isn't sure how long he will be able to hold it. The dragon lunges and he whack it on the snout. It roars its fury into the sky. He dives and finds mediocre shelter behind some fallen masonry. Flames tickle around the edges of the stone, and the heat causes blisters to erupt on his exposed skin.

When the flames stop he jumps up and faces the dragon, it is much closer than he realised. He thrusts the sword at it again but the scales are diamond hard, and the sword can't penetrate them. It is with a sinking heart and the knowledge he will die that he takes a chance. When the dragon opens its mouth to bathe him in fire, he lifts the sword and pierces the lining of its mouth. A look of surprise seems to cross its face, and it curls slowly to the ground, but not before a few strands of fire blow out, caressing his arm.

He screams, the pain exquisite.

The dragon lies dying on the ground. He quietly sobs through the agony of his burnt flesh. He manages to stand and cradle his arm; he makes his way to the ruined castle.

There is one tower standing, a faint reminder of the former glory of the castle. He works his way through the rubble and reaches the base of it. A black door with a gold knocker stands guard. There are numbers there and perhaps a letter, but he is swimming in pain and can't make them out. He turns the handle of the door and enters. Stairs lead up the tower and old-fashioned wallpaper enlivens the walls. He climbs.

Hours, days, years later he comes to the top. There is another door. He opens it to reveal a small room, plain but tidy. A bed sits under the eaves. There is a spinning wheel against the opposite wall. He frowns at it, thinking he should know what that means. As he nears the bed, he brushes up against it. There is a slight sting to the arm untouched by flame, but it goes unnoticed in the jumble of other injuries.

It is empty.

He weeps.

All this. All of it. To come through this all, all the pain, all the sorrow, all the loneliness, and the bed is empty. He sits on the bed, gingerly removes the gloves, his hands protected and unburnt. Tired in body and soul, injured in body and soul. He lies down on the bed and closes his eyes. And he sleeps, sleeps without dreams for thousands of days.

Something brushes his mouth. He lifts a heavy hand to push it away. It contacts silky softness. The feeling comes again, something pressing against his lips. He tries to open his eyes, but they have stayed shut for so long. Warm and tender, he knows what it is know. Lips, lips, which will be pink and full, lips utterly kissable, moving against his mouth, moving with his lips. Soft kisses, hungry with desire, asking him, pleading for him to wake up.

His arm, the arm he was sure was charred, lifts again and his hand touches once more. He knows this, knows who this is. These are curls, chestnut, and silk, glorious curls wreathing a beloved head. He twines his fingers around them gently pulling back. He still can't open his eyes.

The mouth pulls away. The loneliness that had clung to him like spider webs, gossamer threads, fills him again. He is bereft without those lips. The voice he had heard says his name.

"John. Wake up"

He's just so tired.

"John, I have been waiting for you. Open your eyes for me."

Slowly, as if the weighted chains clung to his lashes, he lifts his lids. Focusing seems impossible. Whatever, whoever was standing there is a blur. He blinks.

The man from the roof, the angel, the one with the clipped wings, stands there, leaning over him, in the room at the top of the tower. He smiles the special smile, the just-for-John smile. John groans and tries, oh he tries, so hard to smile back.

"Shh, you have been asleep for a hundred years. Take your time." The weight of someone sitting on the bed is familiar and new. He rolls to his side and curls his arm around the man on the bed. He lays his head on his other arm, the arm he was certain had been ruined but it is whole once more.

He takes a deep breath, breathing in the faint smell of cigarettes. He sighs and mumbles into the leg his head is resting against.

"I should know you."

"You do know me."

"I can't remember."

"Sleeping for so long will do that."

"You never sleep."

"Not true. I slept and dreamt of you."

"I wanted to but I couldn't."

"Yet here you are."

"Here I am." He lifts his head, blinking up at the beautiful face bent over him. "And what is your name?"

"Sherlock."

"Sherlock. Where were you? I was waiting for you."

"Held captive by my incompetence."

"I see. I suppose I should take care of you then."

"Most definitely. I am useless on my own."

They kiss a while longer and with each kiss, John's strength returns.

Eventually, they make their way down the tower, out to the grounds around the castle. It shimmers and fades, disappearing as they leave. The hedge is gone and in its place grow roses, perfect and as red as John's blood. They pass through the hedge and the Narnian layers, the air redolent with the smell of roses, down the stairs until they come to the landing. John smiles at Sherlock, cups his face and kisses him. He opens the door to the flat.

Sherlock smiles. "This will do nicely." He kisses John back, kisses him as if he couldn't get enough.

They make their way into the kitchen where there is tea waiting.

End
file.